

Choose Your Own Ground by TolkienScholar

Category: Stranger Things, 2016

Genre: Angst

Language: English

Characters: Jonathan B., Nancy W.

Status: Completed

Published: 2019-07-03 02:33:20

Updated: 2019-07-03 02:33:20

Packaged: 2019-12-12 18:42:55

Rating: K+

Chapters: 1

Words: 599

Publisher: www.fanfiction.net

Summary: Drabble (x4). Tag to Ep. 1x5. Jonathan took the gun from her because it was the right thing to do. But that didn't mean he was ready to take another life. Even if - maybe especially because - he could hear his Dad's voice in his head telling him to.

Choose Your Own Ground

Disclaimer: I do not own *Stranger Things*. No copyright infringement is intended. The title is a line from the song "Breathe (in the Air)" by Pink Floyd.

MC4A Fill Number: Animal Verses, Fill #1; Seriously Important (Not), Fill #1; Eternal Rhapsody, Fill #3; Snicket Fence, Fill #6; By Any Other Name, Fill #8; Fem Power Challenge, Fill #8; Shipping War, Fill #2; Specious Narrative, Fill #2

Individual Challenges: In a Flash (Y); New Fandom Smell (Y); Rian-Russo Inversion (N); Tissue Warning (N); Interesting Times (N); Shipmas (N); Themes & Things A—Death (N)

Representations: Jonathan Byers; Nancy Wheeler; Byers Family; Thumper & Bambi; Killing for Sport, Killing from Compassion; Verbal/Emotional Abuse; Being a Man

Bonus Challenges: Trickster's Union—Rabbit; Second Verse (Machismo—Fear, Unwillingness to Act; Mouth of Babes; Nontraditional; Not a Lamp)

Tertiary Bonus Challenges: Rail

Summer Bingo Space Address: 5A – Fire

Ship: Jonathan Byers/Nancy Wheeler (Jancy)

List: Summer Medium 1 (Death/Dying)

Word Count: 400

Tag to Ep. 1x5: "The Flea and the Acrobat"

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You see the gun shaking in Nancy's hand, and you know what you have to do. His voice is in your head, loud and harsh: *Man up, boy! I didn't raise you to be such a sissy!* You flinch away from the sound, from the image of the mangled rabbit whose life *you* just snuffed out, but it's only a memory, and this, the whimpering deer and Nancy trembling beside you, is now. And as horrifying as the alternative is, you know it shouldn't have to be her.

"I'll do it," you say, holding out your hand for the gun.

She hesitates. "But I thought you said—"

"I'm not nine anymore." You wish she'd stop looking at you that way, like she pities you, like she isn't sure you have it in you to graduate from killing Thumper to killing Bambi. The worst thing is, maybe you don't.

Man up, he says.

You take the gun and get to your feet, aiming at the deer's head. You focus on its injuries, on its torn and bloodied throat. This isn't killing a rabbit for sport, you tell yourself. This is compassionate. It's the right thing to do.

So why can't you just fire already?

Nancy's turned her head away, unable to watch. She's leaning towards you, her head so close you'd swear you can feel wisps of her hair brushing against the sleeve of your jacket, but she doesn't touch you. If your name was Steve Harrington, her head would be buried in your shoulder right now and you'd have your arm around her, comforting her even as you take the fatal shot. *Would Steve Harrington be man enough to shoot?* you wonder.

Man up.

You close your eyes, willing your paralyzed fingers to move. It's like the nerves connecting them to your brain have been severed; you're giving the command, but there's no response.

Nancy gives a sharp gasp, and your eyes fly open just in time to see the deer vanish into the underbrush, dragged by something you couldn't see. "What was that?" she breathes.

"I don't know," you answer. You don't add that you didn't see it because you had your eyes closed like a coward. You don't tell her that your next thought is, *At least I didn't have to kill the deer*.

Turns out Dad was right. You're not much of a man after all.